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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 001742

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KMCA](#) [KMPI](#) [YM](#)
SUBJECT: RULING PARTY OFFICIAL COMMENTS ON ELECTIONS, LOCAL
COUNCILS AND THE PRESS

REF: A. SANAA 1313
[1](#)B. SANAA 649

Classified By: DCM Nabeel Khoury for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. On May 31, Ambassador met with the ruling GPC party's new ASYG for Political and External Relations (and also Minister of Youth and Sports), Abd al-Rahman al-Aqwa. During the meeting, Aqwa informed Ambassador that a recent breakdown in negotiations (now back on track) between his party and the Joint Meetings Party (JMP) opposition coalition was the fault of an unreasonable JMP. Aqwa, a former Minister of Information, also commented on the ROYG's decision to scrap the recent press law bill as well as on the status of local councils in Yemen. End Summary.

Elections

[1](#)2. (C) On May 31, Ambassador paid a congratulatory call to the GPC's newly appointed ASYG Abd al-Rahman al-Aqwa. Responding to Ambassador's question on the breakdown of recent talks between his party and the JMP, Aqwa commented that it was the JMP's fault. (Ref. A) "We are all very keen to have an open and free election," he declared, but the JMP's insistence of focusing the negotiations on the composition of the Supreme Council for Elections and Referenda's (SCER) was simply too late in the process to be meaningful. (Ref. B) Aqwa also complained that the opposition was "spoiled by our treatment of them," noting that negotiations were "give and take," which the opposition was just not engaging in yet.

[1](#)3. (C) Addressing allegations of widespread fraud in May's registration process, Aqwa acknowledged that there were abuses, of which both sides were equally as culpable. As an example, he pointed out the JMP's recent refusal to a GPC proposal to release any names alleged to have been registered illegally in order to allow third party review. "The GPC would be more than happy to sign any document to ensure the SCER's neutrality," he concluded.

Local Councils

[1](#)4. (C) Turning to the issue of local councils, Aqwa commented on how pleased he was with the process of decentralizing decision making and fiscal authority, which would "greatly help with Yemen's development." He noted that local councils still faced many challenges, many of which were still not clear on their roles. He forecasted that once many of these councils reached the requisite level of sophistication to execute their duties, they would be able to more effectively define their responsibilities.

15. (C) Responding to Ambassador's comment that the ROYG's recent decision to scrap the press law bill, which had no input from civil society, was a positive thing, Aqwa -- himself a former Minister of Information -- commented that he actually helped author the first law. He further noted that while the press had to be free, it also had to be "responsible," particularly with cases involving "national security and insurgency." After Ambassador explained that there are no press laws, but libel and slander laws, Aqwa exclaimed that "even President Saleh" would agree with such an approach if he understood it.

16. (C) Biographical Note: Known as a GPC hawk, Aqwa is also an unyielding loyalist to Saleh, who is also married to Aqwa's sister. Post sources describe Aqwa as either arrogant, a hard-liner, or "just not that brilliant." Aqwa is a former Minister of Information. Many have told us that under Aqwa the MinINFO was rife with corruption and mismanagement. His son, Khalid al-Aqwa, is the MFA Assistant Deputy Minister for Europe and the Americas. Another one of his sons also works for the President's office. In meetings with U.S. officials, Aqwa is polite, engaging and well briefed. He does not speak in English in meetings, although he seems to understand the language.

17. (C) Comment: Aqwa was affable during his first meeting with Ambassador. Although he is known for playing unnecessary hardball with the opposition, this time around Aqwa -- who walked out of the last negotiation session with the opposition -- is justified in his criticisms of the JMP, which is making unreasonable demands this late in the

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election cycle. (Ref. B) Post anticipates that Aqwa will be much more aggressive with forwarding his party's agenda and dealing with the opposition than was his predecessor, potentially reducing the chances that the GPC and JMP will come to a compromise on administrative issues before September's elections. End Comment.
Krajeski